

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 2, 2021, AGRAHAYAN 17, 1428 BS

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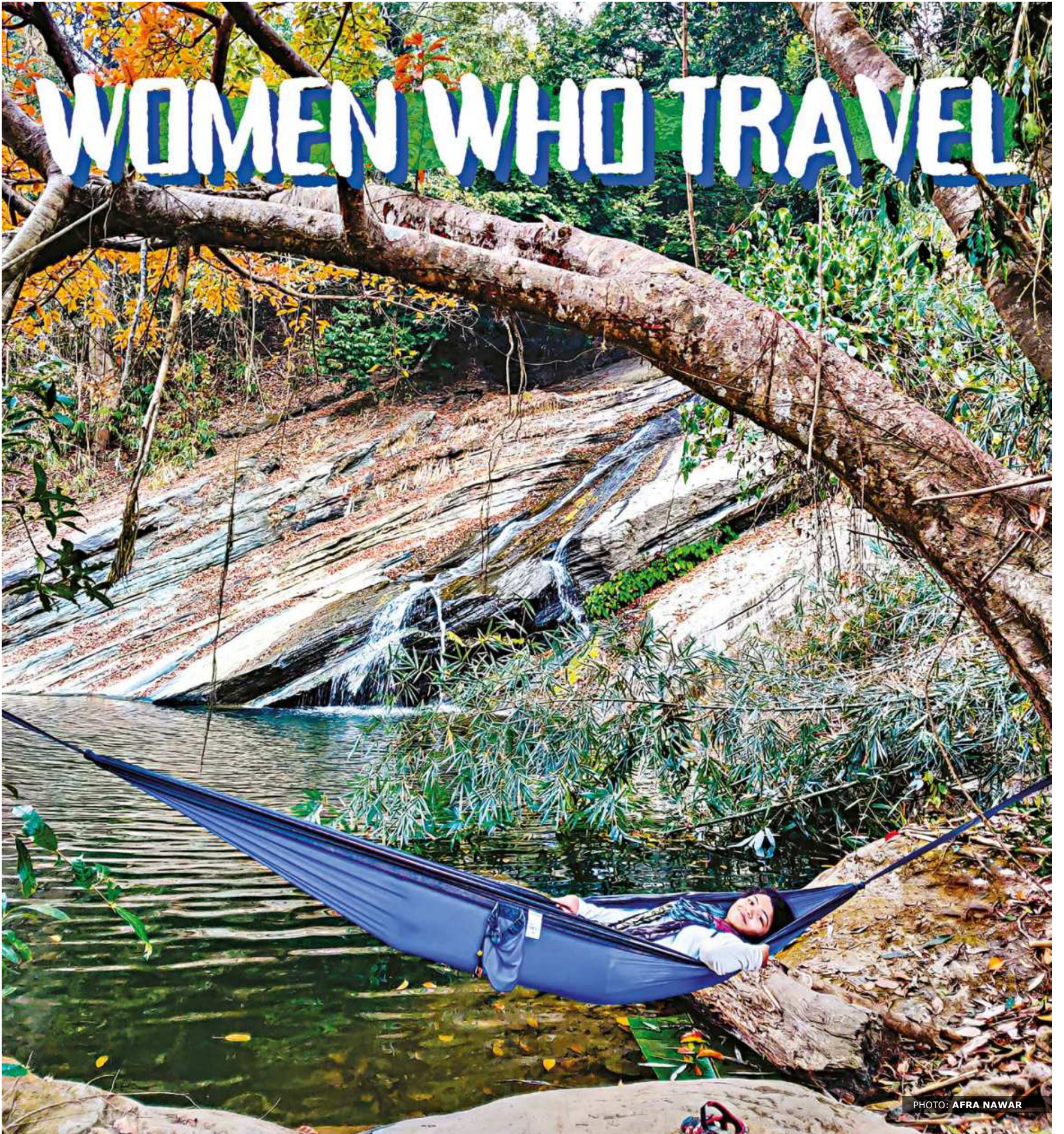


PHOTO: AFRA NAWAR

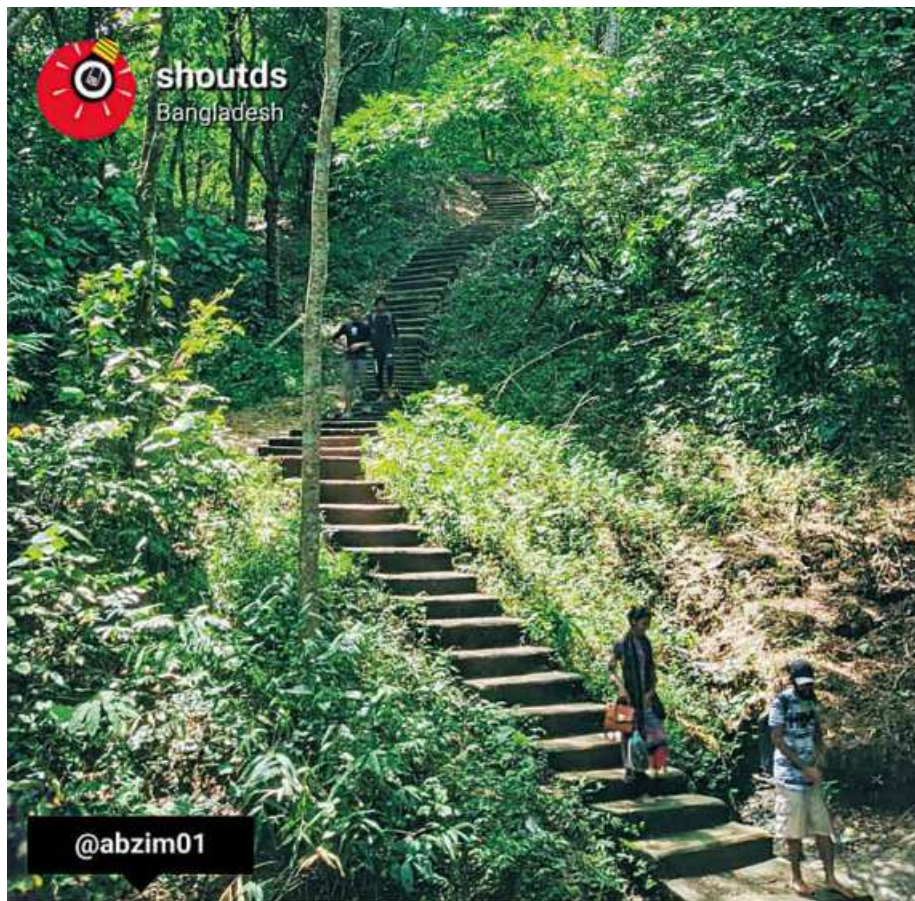
EDITORIAL

I am not a morning person. It's really difficult for me to go to bed by 11 and then wake up sometime around 6 or 7 in the morning. I am more of a noon person, and that's probably what makes me salty.

As the day progresses, however, my mood gets a little better. I get to work, meet people, have some good conversations, and my day starts feeling a lot more exciting. But do these things make me less salty and more sweet? Probably. Sadly, no one ever called me sweet, at least not at work, but that's alright. I appreciate that they respect boundaries.

Speaking of boundaries, I realized that every time I don't watch our cricket team play, they win. So for the sake of our cricket, and the combined-sanity of our population, I am going to stop watching cricket, at least the matches Bangladesh plays in. And if that doesn't help, I don't know what will. I have played my part, have you?

– Faisal Bin Iqbal, Sub-Editor & Digital Coordinator, SHOUT



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PLAYWATCH

MUSIC



The Art of Musical Storytelling with YOASOBI

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Formed in 2019, YOASOBI, consisting of Vocaloid producer and songwriter Ayase and singer-songwriter Ikura, broke into the J-pop scene with their debut single *Yoru ni Kakeru* (Racing Into The Night). And with that, we were introduced to a form of musical storytelling the world had hardly seen before.

The idea of taking a story and turning it into music is not new. However, YOASOBI is currently revolutionising this artform. The duo's ability to take short stories and turn them into lyrical prose with catchy pop verses and upbeat music is awe inspiring. Each song they produce narrates a story, usually something that depicts a human condition or emotion. YOASOBI's approach to such musical storytelling is what bears witness to their musical prowess.

Take *Yoru ni Kakeru* for example. TikTokers danced their hearts out to the track, and why shouldn't they? It's a melodious song with upbeat and catchy music, calling out to its audience to break into dance. Only when you delve into the song's lyrics and origin story do you realise that it tells the tragic tale of a boy who gave in to the temptation of Thanatos unwillingly while pursuing the girl he once thought he had saved from death.

It's not just YOASOBI that merges emotional, often tragic and despairing, lyrics with funky music that give out gleeful vibes. Japanese music, especially the J-pop genre, does so regularly. What makes Ayase and Ikura stand out is the way they manage to create music that complements the lyrics, while making

sure that it lets out the inner emotions of the story.

As a Vocaloid producer, Ayase's music is mostly computer generated, along with your usual instruments like guitar riffs, bass and musical keyboards. The responsibility then falls on Ikura, the vocalist, to take the music and emotional lyrics, and create something breathtaking. Needless to say, she does a brilliant job in doing justice to Ayase's compositions, giving us songs that always strike a chord within us.

The music videos that accompany YOASOBI's songs also deserve a lot of praise. Without them, the storytelling would be somewhat incomplete. Mostly animated, the videos are created by independent animators. The colour pops and scene transitions in these videos beautifully depict the various stages of human emotion that the song takes us through. These animated music videos are integral to YOASOBI's musical storytelling.

YOASOBI is by far one of the most exciting Japanese music groups I've seen in a while. The duo of Ayase and Ikura, and their sublime approach to musical storytelling, is sure to turn heads in the coming days. Each song they produce is like a well-orchestrated stage play, something that will appeal to your eyes and ears, and will continue to resonate with you for as long as your heart allows it.

Faisal Bin Iqbal is sub-editor and digital co-ordinator at SHOUT. Reach out to him at abir.afc@gmail.com

An open letter to those who are tired of Dhaka



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

NAZIFA RAIDAH

Citizens of Dhaka,

I hear you. Dhaka is one chaotic inferno. Now don't come at me with your playlists on how beautiful this city is, because you're right, it is kind of alright in terms of sunsets. The rest, though – spending hours in traffic, never having a moment of complete silence, getting desensitised to tragedy, the toxic air – it's mostly an agonising experience.

Throughout the pandemic, many of us went on a deep-dive through our consciousness. Staying at home, it felt as though we were made to confront bitter truths and accept difficult realities. The Grim Reaper had visited the city, taking our near and dear ones with him. Many lost their means of income. And don't even get me started on the mental health toll.

It is at times like this, one asks themselves – *what are we even here for anyway?*

If you were looking for a constructive answer to that question, I don't have it. All I can tell you is that, as humans, we tend to conjure our own sense of things, based on our experiences and our learned values that help put those experiences in decipherable boxes. But how does it make sense if our reality is riddled with grief? The question pecks away at my brain like a woodpecker.

Not too long ago, just within the last century, before the world had witnessed world wars and borders were less stringent, it was the time of the empires and exploration. My best bet is, in those times, when individuals found themselves in this precarious position, they set off to the unknown to find those answers. Marco Polo, a simple Venetian merchant, ended up as an official of

the Privy Council appointed by Kublai Khan's reign in China. Scholars travelled far and wide, to enhance their understanding of the world and to challenge what they already knew.

Take Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan scholar who travelled more than any other explorer in pre-modern history, visiting southern Eurasia, including Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, China, and the Iberian Peninsula over a period of 30 years. I wonder how they felt before they set sail. Did they know they'll outlive the raging seas? Did they wonder if they'll ever be back home again? Were they afraid? Even if they were, they took a chance.

In the olden days, before mental health was recognised, doctors in Bengal would prescribe "*hawa badal*" (a change of atmosphere) when people fell sick. If you think about it, it made sense. Especially for us Dhakaites, this city resembles a pestering brown relative who has no sense of personal space and that is exactly why it necessitates us to take a break from it.

The break doesn't even have to be outside of Dhaka, you can take a stroll through the University of Dhaka, visit the zoo, take a walk through your area at dawn, and take a boat ride on the Buriganga – any place that rids you of the essence of the city.

My dear netizens, if you are feeling big emotions that's swayed by the big blue, get some wind to your sail. Grab your earphones, your masks and sanitizers and set off to the unknown. Go now! Yes, NOW! Get your butt moving.

Nazifa mostly spends her days wondering what leisure even means. Send her your commiserations at nazifa@thedailystar.net

The link between art and mathematics

AYRA AREEBA ABID

Art is more than caressing brushes on a blank canvas or sketching a black and white portrait. It is one of the few rare things to exist on Earth which truly enlightens us. Art has allowed me to view the world in many different ways.

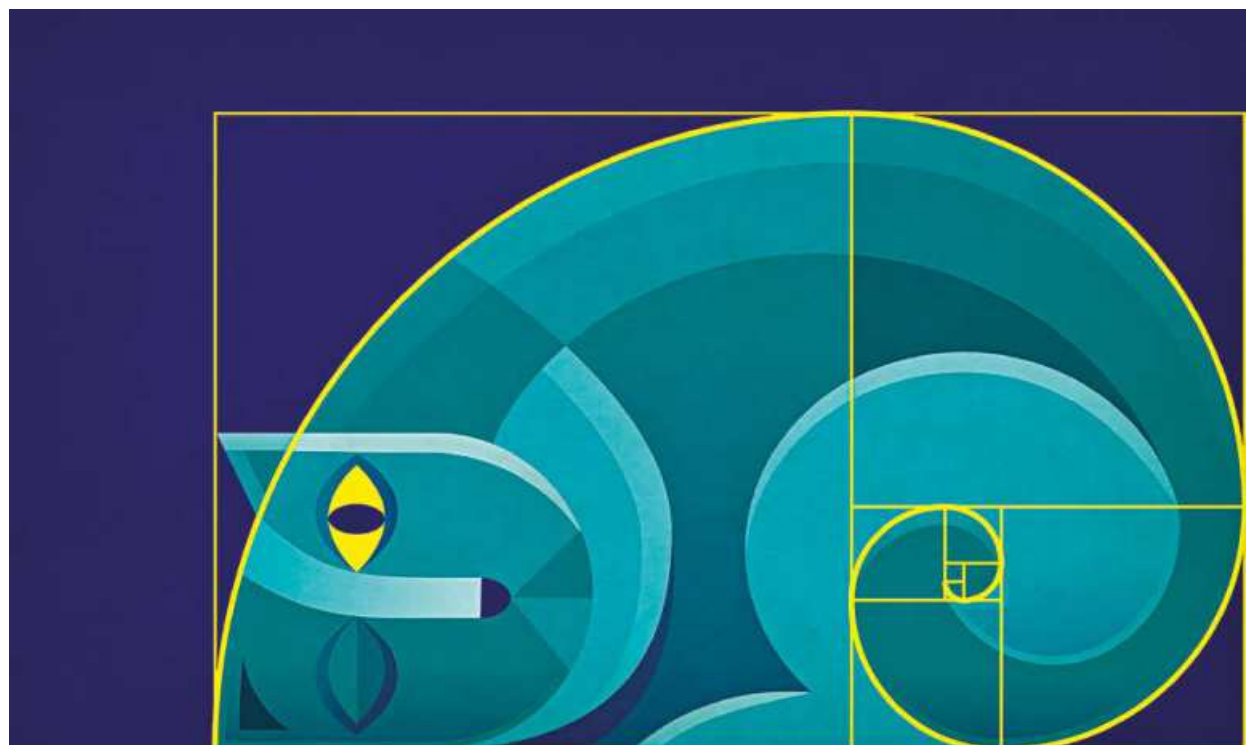
Like any piece of art, any scenario can be projected and understood in various ways. The human mind is anything but simple. It is so complex that we ourselves, at times, fail to decipher some of our own words and actions. However, it is possible to express some things in other methods which we often fail to string into words.

Personally, I've never really seen the world in a mathematical order. However, when it comes to art, there is a great deal of mathematics involved and I think that's beautiful. Art is logical because you get the ability to decode messages or abstract paintings. There's a story and sometimes, a muse behind every successful drawing. It's the artist's way of creative expression.

When I was younger, I remember going to art exhibitions with my mother where she taught me that our perspective on art lies within us. There's no hard and fast rule, no definite formula. Though both art and maths have something in common. It was the idea that paintings and numbers both have a pattern, supported by the famous mathematician G.H. Hardy's words from his memoir, *A Mathematician's Apology*, "A mathematician, like a painter or poet, is a maker of patterns. If his patterns are more permanent than theirs, it is because they are made with ideas."

The world's multifaceted matters are suffused by mathematics and art. There are layers you'll discover, steps that are necessary to reach your final answer. It is also true that there are some questions that are not solvable. You can't simply reach a result.

Art is essentially the same. Much of Leonardo da



Vinci's paintings included mathematics. One of the iconic ones is the Vitruvian Man, which portrayed a perfectly proportioned human form. This, in particular, is the beautiful merging of art and science. The Mona Lisa was also constructed using an aesthetic ratio to bring out "the divine proportion". Art and math breathed together in da Vinci's artworks.

True mathematicians and artists are able to get lost in their world to the point where everything else is on mute. They lose track of time because of the immense passion

and thus leading to inevitable attention to quench the thirst of knowing the unknown.

We need both math and art to keep things sturdy, literally and metaphorically. Art is anything but irrational. The buildings, the trees and even the most minute things you're surrounded by are mostly an intersection of math and art.

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she's a linguistics geek. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com

Finding Bangladesh in Paris

MAISHA ZAMAN

In October 2021, my flat mate and I embarked on a trip to – let's just not disclose the destination – after spontaneously booking flights just three days before. We considered ourselves extremely lucky as we had a 12-hour transit in Paris, which meant that we could spend a few hours in the beautiful city. Little did we know, those 12 hours would turn into a week.

After some back and forth in Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, the largest international airport in France, we managed to get out and take a bus to our first destination – the Eiffel Tower, as one might have guessed already. We spent some time in awe there, mesmerised by the massive structure, which was once the tallest building in the world and a “wonder of the world”. Although it has lost both statuses, the Eiffel Tower continues to garner attraction from tourists all around the world. I had heard that Paris, and particularly the Eiffel Tower, is a spot for lovers to display their affection towards each other; I can now safely validate this.

After clicking some “touristy” photos, we decided to stop by at the Louvre, oblivious to the fact that our plans were going to take a crazy turn from there onwards. We were amazed by the area around the museum, especially in the evening. All the peace and quiet amidst the crowd and structures seemed too good to be true for a while.

A while after, it was time for us to pick up our luggage, which we had kept aside for five minutes, only to discover that someone had utilised those minutes to their benefit and robbed my flat mate off her most important possession – her purse – containing her passport, phone, money, cards and essentially, our trip. Soon, the integrity of the whole issue dawned upon us. My flat mate was abroad, in a country where she didn't speak the language, with me, who was in as much trouble, if not more. Panicking, I somehow managed to



PHOTOS: MAISHA ZAMAN

even gave us hope of finding her belongings. Desperate, we decided to stay at a nearby hotel for the night, mostly thinking how to manage all the paperwork the next day. We did not know if we were heading back to the UK (where we are currently studying) or if my friend was going to be deported to Sri Lanka, her home country.

With all these overwhelming thoughts, we headed out to buy dinner, and surprisingly stumbled upon a Bangladeshi store. After hearing about our sorry state, the shopkeeper *mama* tried to console us by offering free dessert. I was even more surprised to find yet another Bangladeshi shop nearby and spent a few minutes chit-chatting with the shopkeeper who tried his best to persuade me to think about moving to France. Given the cost of living in the UK for a yearlong Master's, the option was probably worth considering.

The next morning, we went to the British Embassy, where we were suggested we go to the Sri Lankan Embassy. Carrying our luggage and trying out local French food to gather all the energy we would require throughout the day, we finally ended up at the Sri Lankan Embassy, an hour before it was to be closed for the day. Luckily, the staff there managed to provide my flat mate with a temporary passport – within

that hour! Relieved with the thought that we could accomplish at least one task in an otherwise hectic day at an unknown city, we kept looking for cheap places to stay; I was, after all, the “bank account” for this impromptu Paris trip. We finally found a place near the Gare du Nord, which is among the six large mainline railway stations in Paris. Unbeknownst to me, I would be living in a mini Bangladesh for the next few days.

Imagine seeing Bangladeshi people and hearing Bangla conversations on the streets and in the restaurants, spotting Bangladeshi fruit vendors in the metro stations, discovering *Mughlai porota*, *peyajju*, *tilapia maach*, *shoil maach*, *gorur mangsho bhuna*, *chhola*, *doi* and other Bangladeshi dishes in the heart of Paris. Here, I even spotted some saree shops. What attracted me the most was the fact that the shops had Bangladeshi names such as “Café Bangla” and “Café Sundarban”, unlike in the UK where most Bangladeshi-run restaurants brand themselves as Indian restaurants and tweak the flavours accordingly. After a long time, I actually found authentic Bangladeshi flavours, that too in Paris.

The next few days were spent exploring the city using trains, taxis, metros and tuk-tuks, as tourists do. Meanwhile, we also

had to be done with some paperwork, as my friend needed a temporary biometric residence permit to return to the UK and avoid being deported to Sri Lanka. We got a phone for her from a Bangladeshi shop at a discounted rate as I requested the *mama* to lower the price. We obtained more discounts from other Bangladeshi stores where the *mamas* helped with topping up her phone and providing good quality appliances. These details may sound trivial, however, when you are away for a long time and come across places that feel like home, and on top of that, when your own people help you out, you really feel a sense of pride and admiration for your country.

Even then, I wonder how much we know about the Bangladeshis who are staying in France, seeking asylum, mostly since 2008. Where is the research on their living conditions, how have they made a living for themselves in foreign land, and what challenges do they face in their lives?

At the end of the day, the unexpected Paris trip turned out to be a beautiful experience for me. From finding Bangladesh to watching the sunset at the Eiffel Tower, from having *bhata* and *murgir jhol* to supporting my flat mate through a difficult time, the week in Paris was “surprenante!”

WOMEN WHO TRAVEL

Doubts, risks, and the joy in exploration

TASNIM ODRIKA

A month ago, three of my female friends planned a trip to Cox's Bazar. They decided to take a late night bus. It was a simple enough plan which should have been easily executable by any adult but I ended up not going because there was no way I could explain to my parents that I would be traveling, at night on a bus, to Cox's Bazar with three other girls even though I am a university graduate with a full-time job.

The above situation is not uncommon for any woman with wanderlust living in Bangladesh. Many have had to bury their urge to travel into the unknown while others, who have the privilege of being able to go abroad, have done that as an alternative. And this is another common theme I've come across while writing this article. Most parents who have been protective of girls wanting to travel within Bangladesh have easily allowed them to do so outside of the country.

Nevertheless, I have always wondered what it would be like to be out on your own in nature or exploring a completely new place alone.

Afra Nawar, an engineer working for a Bangladeshi mobile financial service provider, shared her experience of traveling alone within the country for the first time.

“I have travelled extensively abroad as a solo traveller but ever since Covid-19 hit and the international borders became off-limit, I started travelling within the country as an alternative,” says Afra. Her journey initially began after she met some trekkers through social media groups who enjoy going off-trail inside Bandarban.

“My first trip was to Nafakhum and Amiakhum in Bandarban. The whole trail consists of various mountainous lakes and you climb mountains and boulders to reach a beautiful waterfall. It requires 7 to 8 hours of trekking to reach Amiakhum. When the first trip turned out okay, it put me at ease and prepared me for my next ones and I ended up going to three more trekking trips inside Bandarban and even camped on top of Marayan Tong on a freezing December night, which was again, a

whole different experience for me,” she explains.

Now, a lot of the time, people ask, “What is the need for traveling alone for women?” You could just travel with your family, right?

In reply, Iqra L. Qamari, a junior consultant working for Public Private Partnership Authority Bangladesh, explains, “When you travel with your family, more often than not, you're under some form of supervision. It's liberating for me to travel alone or with my friends where I can be myself.”

She went on to share an experience. The place she talks about is the waterfall called Hum Hum also known by the locals as Cheetah Falls, situated in the Rajkandi reserve forest in Kamalganj, Moulvibazar District.

“The waterfall is a five-hour trek away and hence you are ideally supposed to start at dawn. But we started the trek at 2 PM. Of the two paths to the waterfall, we took the scenic one with small waterfalls along the way. On our way, the waterfalls created slides and huge puddles where we sat pretending to be in Jacuzzi. It was beautiful. By the time we reached the waterfall, it was dusk. Now, in this situation, if we were with our parents, there would be outbursts and they would have freaked out. But, my friends and I were laid back and we were enjoying the journey. As it got dark, we lost our way back but we were still enjoying the adventure of it. We thought it was a very rare experience,” recalled Iqra.

She further added, “We understand very well that it was a risky situation to be in but it was a very memorable experience. When we found our way back, we came out of the forest with torn sandals, fire-ant bites, and leeches stuck to our body.”

However, this is not to glorify traveling inside Bangladesh for women, as adventures are not devoid of risks and safety concerns.

“On our night journey to St. Martin's island, my friend and I were the only female passengers on the bus. Right after getting on the bus, both of us became quite stressed. We were two girls travelling alone at

night. We could feel other passengers judging us and talking about us which was quite unpleasant,” said Anupoma Joyeeta Joyee, a barrister and advocate, while talking about her first-time experience of traveling alone with a female friend inside Bangladesh.

“At one point, when we were at a stoppage, after finishing our dinner and getting on the bus, one of the male passengers had his phone angled towards us. It was clear that he was taking our pictures. When I confronted the person, he denied it and said that he was actually talking on the phone. He retaliated to my accusation with a raised voice and most passengers took the man's side. I realised that the more I argued, the more I would increase people's hostility towards me and so after a while I had to step down,” she recounted.

Regardless, this experience did not dampen the trip for either of them and after reaching the resort at their destination, the duo was beyond ecstatic.

“I understand everyone will have different degrees of trouble while traveling in Bangladesh especially if they are a solo traveller. When we were at St. Martin's the first day, we were so content and satisfied with ourselves for having done that. It was an experience of a lifetime in the sense that we were always told travelling alone as a female in Bangladesh isn't possible, but we did that. It made me feel empowered,” commented Joyee.

Now, looking back at my broken Cox's Bazar plan, a part of me wishes I had taken that leap, while another part of me is fully aware of the security concerns that perturb not just my parents but myself as well. The unfairness of the situation where I have to take so many things into account in order to embark on an adventure here is clear to me and all we can hope for is sometime in the near future, all of us can hop on buses and trains to discover the world irrespective of our gender.

Tasnim Odrika has only one personality trait and that is cats. Share ideas for new personality traits with her at odrika_02@yahoo.com



ask the server at a restaurant for help. She connected us to the emergency police hotline and suggested that we visit the nearby police station. During the ride to the police station, my flat mate tried to convince me to catch the onward flight to our planned destination. She almost had me convinced but, thankfully, I realized I could not just leave my friend stranded in foreign land. I decided to stay with her, whatever came by.

We registered a complaint with all the details we could manage and the police

THE DEFINITIVE YOUTH MAGAZINE SHOOT



PHOTO: AFRA NAWAR

What is a “Model Pharmacy”?

BUSHRA ZAMAN

Have you ever come across the term “Model Pharmacy” or “Model Medicine Shop” displayed on the signs near the entrances of certain pharmacies, sometimes entailing a lot of other difficult to read small writing, and wondered what the term meant?

The basic concept involves certain rules which model pharmacies are expected to follow. In my opinion, an easy way to understand this is by what the term “model” normally indicates -- ideal.

Ideally, certain rules are meant to be followed by such pharmacies, including the presence of a designated area for storing medication that cannot be dispensed without a prescription given by a doctor. This actually applies to medication, including antibiotics, the misuse of which can cause antibiotic resistance.

Also, when you buy medication, you may have inquiries regarding the medicine you have been prescribed and prefer to have things explained to you in person rather than looking for answers on the internet.

Understandable, because sometimes looking for answers on the internet can make one feel like a hypochondriac -- everything you see seems to apply to you. The model pharmacy initiative specifically mentions the minimum educational requirements for practicing pharmacists to dispense medication to you. What this does



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

is it allows you to be properly counselled.

Yes, patient counselling can also be done by pharmacists to rid you of any confusions you may have regarding the medicine you are about to take, such as side effects and whether or not you can opt for alternative drugs with the same generic name.

The requirements set by the regulatory authority, which can be found on the official Directorate General of Drug Administration website, include particular conditions regarding the storage of medicine. You'd be surprised upon discovering how specific medications are actually meant to

be stored, and being counselled regarding this can actually help your medication remain effective and safe for longer.

Setting a minimum educational requirement for the role likely increases the safety of the patients concerned as potentially more efficient healthcare is offered, which is one of the main objectives of the model pharmacy initiative. It has also increased employment options for pharmacy graduates. Model pharmacies are not solely limited to independent retail pharmacies. They also include some well-established hospital pharmacies too.

Before I started studying pharmacy, I was confused as to what pharmacists actually do. When I finally started my degree, I found myself explaining to all my friends that simply selling medication does not make you a pharmacist, and that there are also a lot of other tasks we are required to do.

The model pharmacy initiative may have been the stepping stone to providing more employment options to pharmacists and hopefully may contribute to increasing communication between qualified pharmacists and patients, so that I may one day not have to explain what I do anymore.

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushrazaman31@yahoo.com

My life as an adult with a babyface

RASHA JAMEEL

My face is a rebel, constantly refusing to cooperate with my bones and my immune system as they all cooperate in my natural process of aging.

Yes, I have heard my fair share of “You’ll look 25 at 40”, but right now, I’d really like to live an adult life that is not influenced by how youthful I appear.

BABYFACE >>> ACTUAL AGE

I still remember the first time I applied for my NID card. The administrative officers sent me home out of suspicion. It was only after my mother accompanied me to the venue the next day that I was taken seriously.

Unfortunately, this wasn’t the only time that I was dismissed because of my babyface. The attitude persisted over the years, leading to people speaking over me in group discussions, servers at restaurants being unsure about taking my orders, and officials at the bank refusing to let me open my own bank account. Next thing you know, your feelings are being invalidated on account of you “looking cute while upset.”

A REGULAR AT THE KIDS’ TABLE

If I had a penny for every single time I’d been seated with the kids at events, I’d be rolling in cash at this point. I’ve been paired with kids at everything from science fairs at school to dance performances at weddings. While kids can make for fun company at such occasions, I can only find comfort in interacting with individuals of my own age group.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF “25 GOING ON 15”

There are moments when it seems as though people are taking my babyface seriously enough to actually mistake me for a child, and subsequently treat me as such. This

is where I can sense my adulthood being called into question.

Speaking over me in group discussions thus becomes the tip of the iceberg as worse things follow. People expect you to put up with unnecessary mollycoddling, uncomfortable face-touching, constant questioning about anti-aging concoctions, and just a general mocking attitude towards your life as an adult.

Having a babyface doesn’t come without its pros of course. You get to pass as a younger individual who has access to certain perks meant for kids, such as half-off ticket prices at amusement parks and buying clothes at lesser prices from the kids’ section at clothing stores.

The “cute factor” present in your babyface just might help you get away with breaking your mother’s favourite set of crockeries. And then there is the fan-favourite theory of looking “25 at 40”. But the fact remains that an individual’s babyface shouldn’t be a determining factor in how they’re treated. Proper identification documents should suffice as evidence of actual age, leaving a person’s sense of maturity to be determined by their wit and emotional intelligence.

Rasha Jameel’s calendar begins at ‘Deadline 001’ and ends at ‘Deadline 7634872354’. Help her locate the month of July in all this mess at rasha.jameel@outlook.com



FABLE FACTORY

HALO

SABIH SAFWAT

So lost in your righteousness
 You fail to contain the violence.
 The demons in this world are ones you create
 With intolerance, estrangement... blind hate.

Maybe your path's the one leading to heaven,
 You'll attain eternal peace, surrounded by angels.
 Does that give you the right to
 Inflict wounds, trample on faith?

Black and white, good and evil,
 That's where it all goes wrong.
 Ever thought to pause and think for yourself
 If those old fairy tales are worth the blood shed?

I'm sure it's warm and comforting for you
 I'm glad you've found a way to solace.
 Just, please, don't
 Drag me there with you.



Would you let me cry?

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"Your Amma called," whimpered Abba,
 "She's not... well. She wants to see you."

It's always your Amma or Arko's
 Amma. It's never Renu.

"What do you mean she's not well?
 Where's she been all this time?" Arko
 asked coldly. Amma's not been with
 them for some 7/8 years now. He lost
 count a few years back. With the pro-
 motions incoming, 2046's been pretty
 tough.

"She's been staying at your Mama's
 old place. Near Keraniganj. She wouldn't
 tell me much. She just said we should go
 see her and hung up," Abba smiled, "9
 years and still the same drama."

Arko stared at his old man. Abba
 always resented the idea of sentiment,
 even as a kid, according to Arko's Fupu.
 That's how the idea of building that
 junky old machine came to his head. It's
 rusty now but that machine broke the
 family into pieces. The idea was pretty
 simple - whenever you feel like crying,
 you go to the basement and put those
 special goggles on. You inject the serum,
 connect the wires and gently go numb.
 It wasn't painful. You were just left with a
 feeling of emptiness. Except you couldn't
 comprehend why you felt empty in the
 first place. It sucked away the pain, the
 tears or the very reason why tears existed.

Abba built it when Arko's elder brother
 Abir was 12. After a few years of trial
 and error, he perfected the device and
 Arko started using it as early as 4. He
 doesn't even remember the first memory
 of pain. Abir told him stories of tears after
 their parents fell asleep but they were
 hard to believe.

It was a damp brick house surrounded
 by drains on opposing sides. The trees in
 the front secluded the house from chaos.
 A woman in her 30s opened the rusty



collapsible gate and showed them in. The
 musky air made Arko feel a bit dizzy. As
 the woman stopped in front of a small
 room with its entrance covered with dusty
 curtains, Arko followed his father in. Even
 on a bright sunny afternoon, the room

was dark and foggy. Arko looked around
 the sooty walls. He could feel the wear-
 iness of the floor against his bare feet. The
 chill from his feet reached his spine as he
 saw his mother lying on the bed.
 Wrinkled skin under her sunken eyes

looked like she'd been crying every day
 for the past 9 years. Her head, once so full
 of hair, was now bare skin with separa-
 ble strands. With all her strength, she sat
 straight and gathered whatever was left of
 her voice, "Arko."

Arko stood there. His eyes could see
 but his vision went blind. Abba limped to
 the bed and sat beside her. In a muffled
 voice, she told Abba, "No more tears to
 suck out, see?"

Arko's hands started shaking, his bones
 clattering. He fell onto his knees. With
 his hands on the floor, he lifted his head
 up and stared at his father with blood-red
 eyes, "Abba, can I cry?"

Arko's shirt ripped itself into shreds.
 Slits on his back fleshed out into wounds.
 Arko screamed at the top of his lungs as
 tears came pouring out of the wounds
 on his back. As Abba stood with awe and
 shock, Arko let out all the anguish he'd
 been storing up for the past 35 years.

Amma rose from her bed and crawled
 towards him, crossing the pool of tears.
 She took him in her arms, "When did you
 stop using the machine?"

"Just after Abir left," cried Arko. He
 buried his head against her warm neck. As
 he put his hands on her back to hold her
 tighter, he could feel the tears from her
 flesh wounds pouring all over his trem-
 bling hands. Wounds he saw on Abir's
 back that night before he left. Wounds
 that his father didn't have.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" sighed Amma.
 Arko closed his eyes. As he rubbed her
 back gently, he couldn't feel the wrinkles
 or the wounds anymore. Only the tears.
 Tears softened her coarse skin each pass-
 ing second.

"It is," whispered Arko.

*Remind Ifiti to be quieter at [hasiburrashidif-
 ti@gmail.com](mailto:hasiburrashidif-

 ti@gmail.com)*



GEMS

Find them in the dirtiest parts of town.
In the dirt, in the darkest of alleys, live uncut gems.
Their shine? In their smiles.
Their joy? In their laughter.
See life in their eyes.

PHOTOS BY NAYEM SHAAN
CURATED BY ORCHID CHAKMA

